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«Autonomie» Revisited

The Autonomist Crossroads in the West German Student Movement's Long March

Seongcheol Kim

«Autonomie» Revisited. The Autonomist Crossroads in the West German Student Movement's Long March. This paper seeks to embed into a broader narrative on the political thought of the West German student movement a reading of Schmid's 1975 text in «*Autonomie*», which synthesized the SDS anti-authoritarians' tradition of a politicized critique of late capitalism with the autonomist impulse in Italian *operaismo*. It is argued that in holding out the promise of revolutionary practice in the absence of revolutionary organization, Schmid displaced the very notion of revolutionary practice from the system to the subject level – an issue raised by Kraushaar's 1978 critique of a «ghettoized» milieu consumed by the «radicalization of its own life context». The trans-localization of the alternative milieu, particularly in the form of Green Lists and «*die tageszeitung*», was subsequently justified by milieu actors as a breakout from the ghetto, but would in turn undermine the milieu's autonomist foundations. Ultimately, Kraushaar's conundrum of «autonomy or ghetto» remained unresolved – reflecting the extra-parliamentary left's inability to integrate strategies of milieu and offensive into a unifying strategy, as Dutschke's 1967 essay *The Long March* had enjoined it to do; the Greens' subsequent entry into parliaments was an expression of the abandonment, not the beginning, of a «long march through the institutions».

Keywords: Alternative milieu – Autonomism – West German student movement.

Introduction

How might it be possible for historians and political theorists today to decipher, nearly a half century after the German '68, «what they thought they were doing»[1]? This simple question has proven to be a difficult one to answer in light of the funda-

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[1] J.W. Müller, *What Did They Think They Were Doing? The Political Thought of the West European '68*, in V. Tismaneanu (ed.), *Promises of 1968. Crisis, Illusion, and Utopia*, Budapest, CEU Press, 2011.

mental heterogeneity in what constituted «the German '68» as well as in what grew out of it subsequently. On the one hand, there is the by now familiar problem that the history of the student movement is often dealt with teleologically, with straight lines leading from 1968 to 1977 (German Autumn), 1983 (the Greens' entry into the Bundestag), 1998 (Red-Green coalition at the federal level), and all kinds of other endpoints in between[2]. On the other hand, the dizzying array of movement-affiliated theoretical journals, newspapers, and circulars – rivaling that of organizations, cells, and localized «projects» of one form or another – has led many scholars to pursue one of several strategies: biographical or autobiographical narratives that process the wider history through the lens of individual experiences[3]; accounts of selected epoch-defining works of mostly non-student theoreticians (especially those of Frankfurt School critical theory) and the students' relations to them[4]; or, especially more recently, detailed accounts of local milieus or specific projects (especially those in media or publishing)[5]. These approaches, while addressing the need to simplify a complex mosaic and to represent the wider picture through select constituent pieces, have left a number of important gaps: in particular, the lack of intellectual histories grounded in the «micro-theory» produced on the pages of the many movement-affiliated publications, including accounts of how key organizational ruptures – such as the dissolution of the SDS, the subsequent growth of the «alternative milieu»[6] in the Seventies, or the formation of Green Lists – were accounted for, justified, and contested by movement actors themselves in theoretical debates, often with reference to shared experiences since the student protests of the Sixties.

The approach presented here aims to embed into an overarching account of the theoretical production of the student movement a reading of Thomas Schmid's attempt in the journal «*Autonomie*» – arguably unique in its systematicity – to conceptualize, on the basis of a revolutionary-theoretical revision, the emerging alternative milieu as a continuation of the student movement. In so doing, the analysis

[2] For discussions of this problem, see W. Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos, Chiffre und Zäsur*, Hamburg, Hamburger Edition, 2000; A. von Lucke, *68 oder neues Biedermeier. Der Kampf um die Deutungsmacht*, Berlin, Klaus Wagenbach, 2008.
[3] G. Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*. *Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967-1977*, Cologne, Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 2001; W. Kraushaar, *Fischer in Frankfurt. Karriere eines Außenseiters*, Hamburg, Hamburger Edition, 2001; P. Hockenos, *Joschka Fischer and the Making of the Berlin Republic. An Alternative History of Postwar Germany*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.
[4] W. Kraushaar (ed.), *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung. Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail 1946 bis 1995*, voll. 1-3, Hamburg, Rogner & Bernhard, 1998; J.W. Müller (ed.), *German Ideologies since 1945. Studies in the Political Thought and Culture of the Bonn Republic*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
[5] S. Reichardt, D. Siegfried (eds.), *Das Alternative Milieu. Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa 1968-1983*, Göttingen, Wallstein, 2010; S. Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft. Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2014; P. Felsch, *Der lange Sommer der Theorie. Geschichte einer Revolte 1960-1990*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 2015.
[6] I use the term following S. Reichardt, D. Siegfried (eds.), *Das Alternative Milieu*, cit.

locates «*Autonomie*» as a defining juncture in the theoretical reconfiguration of the extra-parliamentary left in the Seventies: in the immediate aftermath of the failure of factory agitation and in the absence of the unifying organizational framework of an SDS, the journal took on the ambitious task of the «development of a revolutionary theory appropriate to the reality» – a new reality characterized by what the editorial collective called an «autonomy of struggles» in the plural[7]. Schmid's programmatic text in the journal's first issue formulated a synthesis between the autonomist impulse in Italian *operaismo* (a theory that had influenced the prior strategy of factory agitation) and the SDS anti-authoritarians' tradition of a politicized critique of late capitalism – thus conceiving the emerging alternative milieu both as a continuation of the student movement and, in the absence of an SDS, a form of revolutionary practice divorced from revolutionary organization.

Schmid's text, in other words, is taken to represent both a nodal point in theoretical debates within the extra-parliamentary left, in which a number of key influences, experiences, and traditions came together into a synthesis, and a crossroads, in which the new synthesis, in all its comprehensiveness, revealed (if only retrospectively for many actors) the fundamental strategic choice being made. This synthesis, in turn, can only be understood in the context of theoretical constellations within the SDS, which were characterized by a contested relationship between critique and action: while the «traditionalists» insisted on the analytical primacy of the labour-capital relation and an organizational practice geared toward preparation for the return of a revolutionary working class, the «anti-authoritarians» took up contemporary accounts of the pluralized forms of domination and repression in late capitalism and called for the immediate «turning over» (*umschlagen*), as Subversive Aktion put it, of critique into action. Whether inspired by accounts of sexual repression, technocratic statism, or society as spectacle, the anti-authoritarians sought to practise critique politically, deriving practical imperatives from it in order to «finally make conscious […] the makeability of our history» (Dutschke)[8]. Schmid attempted to combine a continuation of this tradition – albeit in the context of organizational fragmentation and the failure of factory agitation – with a strategically selective reading of Italian *operaismo* to inaugurate «autonomy» as the new guiding principle for the anti-authoritarian left. This synthesis, however, offered an easy answer to one conundrum at the expense of leaving another unresolved: the notion of autonomy beyond the factory held out the promise of revolutionary practice without revolutionary organization, but failed to account for how autonomous localized practices might add up to take on a «revolu-

[7] Collection *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund / SDS Hamburg*, Archiv des Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung, «Zum Zeitschriftenprojekt Autonomie», undated.
[8] R. Dutschke, *Professor Habermas, Ihr begriffloser Objektivismus erschlägt das zu emanzipierende Subjekt!*, in *Geschichte ist machbar. Texte über das herrschende Falsche und die Radikalität des Friedens*, Berlin, Klaus Wagenbach, 1980.

tionary» function on a system (as opposed to individual subject) level. Indeed, milieu actors seeking to break out of their perceived «ghettoization» and return to a political practice situated on the level of state and society eventually found no other answer than a return to nationwide organizational frameworks, most notably in the form of Green Lists and «*die tageszeitung*» – a move that would in turn undermine the milieu's autonomist foundations, as the Greens' member-based mechanisms of internal democracy and the centralization of the alternative press landscape under «*die taz*» demonstrated.

«Traditionalists» and «Anti-Authoritarians» in the SDS

The debates within the Socialist German Student Union (SDS) had a formative impact on the subsequent history of the extra-parliamentary left by defining the contours of a theoretical terrain on which factional divisions – and, to some extent, the battle lines of the 1970s – would become legible. The SDS, founded in 1946 as an autonomous student organization yet functioning as the *de facto* student wing of the SPD until the party's «incompatibility resolution» (*Unvereinbarkeitsbeschluss*) of 1961[9], came of age in the campaigns against rearmament and the Emergency Acts[10]. A crucial component of the SDS's redefinition as a vehicle for student activism rather than a springboard for careers in the SPD consisted in the formation of what Fichter and Lönnendonker referred to as a «student counter-public» through campaign congresses, flyering campaigns, and the SDS theoretical journal «*neue kritik*» (in addition to local SDS periodicals)[11]. The idea was that theoretical inquiry, or «Theoriearbeit», internal debate in student periodicals, and campus agitation would mutually inform each other; «theory» had served as a demarcating marker *vis-à-vis* SPD-oriented careerists and, following the latter's breakaway in the course of the SDS's break with the SPD, became a unifying one for the various elements that remained in the SDS – a common language in which fundamental questions of organization and strategy were posed and debated. In this context, the schematic division between «traditionalists» and «anti-authoritarians» crystallized in disagreements over the proper theoretical raw material for a diagnosis of the present as well as the political practice – and the scope and form of the students' own agency – that followed from it.

[9] With this step, the SPD cut all ties with the SDS by declaring membership in the latter to be incompatible with membership in the party. This break had been prefigured by the SPD's establishment of an officially party-endorsed student organization, the Social Democratic University Union (SHB), in 1960.
[10] The following account draws on T. Fichter, *SDS und SPD. Parteilichkeit jenseits der Partei*, Opladen, Westdeutscher, 1988; T. Fichter, S. Lönnendonker, *Macht und Ohnmacht der Studenten. Kleine Geschichte des SDS*, Hamburg, Rotbuch, 1998.
[11] *Ibidem*, p. 50.

One high-profile debate on organization in «*neue kritik*» between late 1966 and early 1967 illustrated these differences. In one contribution, Frank Deppe and Kurt Steinhaus – two Marburg-based representatives of the traditionalist wing – called for a comprehensive programme of theoretical training (*Schulung*) by the SDS of its members[12]. Asserting that a «revolutionary practice "here and now"» was not possible in the absence of a revolutionary labour movement, the authors called on the SDS, in its capacity as the «most advanced part of the [student] movement» carrying out *de facto* the function of a «missing socialist party», to adopt a strategy of «internal strengthening of the association» grounded in consciousness-building training. As if to render unambiguous their historical reference point, the authors drew an analogy to Lenin's *What Is To Be Done*: just as the workers in the factories could move beyond mere trade-union consciousness only by means of the «educational work of the party», the masses of students in today's universities (many of whom had been drawn to activism for the first time through the SDS campaigns) would be able to develop something like a «radical-democratic consciousness» only with the help of the «educational work of the SDS». Yet this analogy belied the authors' underlying premise that the students did not constitute a revolutionary subject in their own right: indeed, the students' task was to studiously prepare themselves for the re-emergence of a revolutionary working class. The injunction to study Marxist classics and the historical development of capitalism set the terrain on which this theoretical training would take place: namely, the traditional Marxist terrain of labour and capital, with the working class's apparent dormancy in the present merely belying its historical role as the ultimate agent of revolutionary change.

Anti-authoritarian approaches to the question of organization, by contrast, sought to conceptualize the students as immediate agents of political (if not quite revolutionary) struggle in some way resulting from the pluralized structures of domination in late capitalism. Peter Gäng and SDS chairman Reimut Reiche presented one such approach in an April 1967 article[13]. The authors began from the premise that the «dependent classes» under late capitalism would be unable in the foreseeable future to «develop by themselves the strength for a revolutionary transformation of society». Reflecting Reiche's background as a student of psychoanalysis, the authors proceeded to introduce their own theory of «over-individualization» as a key feature of late-capitalist socialization, whereby a child's process of adaptation (*Anpassung*) now took place less through direct communication with his or her parents in the bourgeois family than through the ever-ubiquitous mass media – with the result that young people accumulated a «psychological tension» that could either translate into an attitude of aggression against the political system or, if manipulated properly

[12] F. Deppe, K. Steinhaus, *Politische Praxis und Schulung im SDS*, «Neue Kritik», 1966, 38/39.
[13] R. Reiche, P. Gäng, *Vom antikapitalistischen Protest zur sozialistischen Politik*, «Neue Kritik», 1967, 41.

by the ruling class, into «faschistoid» aggression against state-constructed internal or external enemies. Within this theoretical framework, the authors defined the most pressing task of the SDS as one of the «political channeling and disciplining of the apolitical protest attitude of the young» – a «protest attitude» that had manifested itself promisingly in schoolchildren's participation in protests against the Vietnam War, but required extension onto other points of articulation such as the campaign against the Emergency Laws. University students, so the argument went, could play a leading role in a mass socialist movement insofar as they possessed a «state of consciousness» and «psychological apparatus» that afforded the cognitive possibility of a «breaking through of manipulation» under conditions of ever-greater sophistication of the latter. The students' intellectual capital – demonstrated by example in the authors' own theorizing of «over-individualization» – thus allowed for an action-oriented agenda on multiple fronts of struggle; the SDS needed to become, according to Reiche and Gäng, an «organization that is loose in form, united in content, and publicly active […] that engages primarily with political agitation in the aforementioned sense». If a psychoanalytic understanding of repression in late capitalism explained the protest potential among schoolchildren, the students, armed with this understanding, had a role to play as agents of political agitation and struggle.

The Reiche-Gäng article's stormy reception in traditionalist circles served to accentuate the fundamental differences between the two camps. One commenter dismissed Reiche and Gäng's method of «psycho-analyzing» that drew on «underived abstractions» and «phenomenological terminology», chiding the authors for bypassing entirely the proper «field of recruitment» for socialist politics: the working class[14]. Ulrich Rödel, in an argument reminiscent of Deppe and Steinhaus, grounded this position in the premise that a socialist strategy «can be determined only on the basis of a political-economic analysis of the developmental tendencies of contemporary capitalism»[15]. The proper foundation for the SDS's political practice, in other words, consisted not in some psychoanalytic pseudo-theory, but in the staple Marxist raw material of labour and capital. In Rödel's own analysis, the stagnation of capital accumulation in the industrial West in the early Sixties, as a result of a «profit squeeze» due to wages and prices' catching up with growth, meant that West German capitalism was increasingly forced to apply downward pressure on wages while accelerating the rate of mechanization in order to recover profit margins. From here, the author concluded that the sole social group that «is directly affected by the concrete political-economic crisis tendencies and conflicts is the German working class»; in this con-

[14] G. Büchner, *Sozialistische Politik?*, «Neue Kritik», 1967, 42/43. This and the following citations were published together as a collection of discussion contributions under the heading *Sozialistische Politik? Bemerkungen zur Theorie einer Revolution des einzelnen Menschen in den spätkapitalistischen Gesellschaften.*
[15] U. Rödel, *Sozialistische Politik?*, «Neue Kritik», 1967, 42/43.

text, workers' resistance to wage cuts and exploitative conditions constituted in itself a system-challenging position. The SDS's central task, then, would be to contribute to the class consciousness of the proletariat through the formation of a socialist party capable of intervening into labour struggles.

The central lines of contestation within the SDS, then, extended well beyond mere labels and onto the question of what kind of theory ought to ground the SDS's political practice: those who insisted on an analytical primacy of the labour-capital relation in capitalism – even in «late capitalism» with its apparently non-revolutionary proletariat – were pitted against others who appealed to pluralized forms of domination that had somehow become cognitively accessible to the students due to the particular impact on the young (as in «over-individualization» or, more broadly, sexual repression) and, if only implicitly, the students' own intellectual capital that allowed them to theorize forms of domination beyond labour exploitation (as in the psychoanalytic model of Reiche and Gäng). This division, in turn, mapped directly onto differing accounts of the proper locus of political practice: the focus on the labour-capital horizon meant that the SDS's present strategy had to be one of preparing analytically for a future revolutionary agency of the working class (Deppe and Steinhaus), if not organizing workers as part of a socialist party on the basis of the present contradictions of capitalism (Rödel); the diagnosis of pluralized forms of late-capitalist repression, on the other hand, suggested the possibility of a political practice bringing together its multiple subjects, from exploited workers to psychologically overloaded schoolchildren. The attacks on the «phenomenological terminology» were indicative of the stakes involved: the very *theoretical* move of drawing on psychoanalysis to conceptualize multiple forms of domination – and, by extension, sources of social antagonism – within capitalism was the first step in subverting the *political-strategic* primacy of the labour-capital relation and theorizing the SDS's role as one of immediate, broad-based agitation.

For the time being, however, the SDS remained a big tent with traditionalist and anti-authoritarian positions largely locked in internal equilibrium – with common-denominator actions such as the campaign against the Emergency Acts keeping the movement in motion. The twenty-second congress of the SDS, held in September 1967, adopted a resolution whose theses reflected a carefully crafted compromise[16]:

> I. The contradictions in the university adequately express the contradictions in society as a whole […]. II. The emancipation of the working class is precondition for the realization of the democratic university […]. III. The rebellion of the students is, in its anti-institutional character, model-like for the strategy of class struggle […]. IV. The SDS, the most consistent group in the oppositional student movement, must recognize and practically work out […] the guiding impulses.

[16] *Resolution zur Hochschulpolitik*, «*Neue Kritik*», 1967, 44.

The first thesis, by conceptualizing the university as «one of the instruments for the enfettering of the living productive force» – through the commodification of research and teaching as well as the training of students to become part of a technologically skilled labour force – held that the revolt of the students from within the university and their democratizing demands against commodifying imperatives suggested both an expression of a contradiction in the primary social relation of labour and capital *and* a structural basis for a political agency of students on the basis of their distinctive positioning within the system. This thesis, piecing together elements of traditionalist and anti-authoritarian orientations, fed into another, correspondingly hybrid conclusion: the student movement could for now function as a hub of socialist politics, but the emancipation of the industrial working class – that other part of mass «living productive force» – would be a precondition for the students' own emancipation within the university (thesis #2). Students and workers, subject to the same underlying regime of rationalized control, were held together by a fundamental «identity of interest», namely the interest in an emancipatory overcoming (*Aufhebung*) of a system of commodity production enfettering the true realization of their productive capacities. At the same time, the SDS asserted its leading role within the socialist movement, a role enabled by the student movement's anti-institutional character (thesis #3) – a jab at the labour movement's bureaucratic trade-union structures – and by the SDS's open-ended practice of learning through action (thesis #4).

If this resolution was the theoretical expression of a compromise at the level of the organization as a whole, others intervened with more radical and action-oriented propositions – most notably in the form of Rudi Dutschke and Hans-Jürgen Krahl's presentation on organization (*Organisationsreferat*) at the same congress[17]. Dutschke, who had famously clashed with Jürgen Habermas in calling on the students to «make history» following the police shooting of Benno Ohnesorg in June 1967[18], now had a theory behind his injunction. In their analysis, the authors characterized late capitalism as a system of «integral statism» in which the authoritarian bureaucratic state and capital had merged into a «collective capitalist» overseeing a symbiotic state-industrial regime of production. In this «gigantic system of manipulations», domination had become so complete that, even without the exercise of fascist terror, the masses were totally incapable of expressing needs or interests autonomous from those generated by the system: «the self-organization of their interests, needs, wishes has thus become historically impossible». As a result, breaking through this steel-hard casing of

[17] R. Dutschke, H.J. Krahl, *Das Sich-Verweigern erfordert Guerrilla-Mentalität*, in *Geschichte ist machbar*, cit. For a more systematic reconstruction of the argument, see W. Kraushaar, *Autoritärer Staat und Antiautoritäre Bewegung. Zum Organisationsreferat von Rudi Dutschke und Hans-Jürgen Krahl auf der 22. Delegiertenkonferenz des SDS in Frankurt*, in W. Kraushaar (ed.), *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, vol. 3, cit.
[18] R. Dutschke, *Professor Habermas*, in *Geschichte ist machbar*, cit.

domination would require the combination of a high level of cognitive insight into the system and a radically negating practice – a role that students could take on in the form of an «urban guerrilla» rousing the masses through «sensually manifest action» and consciously complementing, with its «propaganda of the deed», the «propaganda of the shot» of rural guerrillas in the Third World. The initial task of this vanguard would be to form «revolutionary consciousness groups» that would orchestrate actions producing moments of aesthetic shock to reveal the repressive nature of the system, thereby multiplying the recognition of this repression and, by extension, the ranks of the urban guerrilla itself.

The anti-authoritarians, then, variously drew on the wealth of recent German critical theory on «late capitalism» and its various accounts of sexual repression, technocratic statism, and mass consumption[19]. Recognizable in the Reiche-Gäng theory of «over-individualization» was the influence of Wilhelm Reich's work on «the mass psychology of fascism» identifying sexual repression in child-rearing as a key characteristic of Nazi German society; following Dagmar Herzog's reading that it was in fact the West German society of the Fifties and Sixties that «subsequent 68ers personally experienced as sexually repressive», Reich's work might be seen as having the effect of a contemporary diagnosis of late capitalism, with Nazi Germany serving more as a projection screen of a menacingly unprocessed past[20]. Reiche and Gäng, then, presented a politicized version of Reich in which the stakes between emancipation and repression were ever so conveniently clear-cut: the «psychological tension» resulting from «over-individualization» might lead either to a constructive system-critical attitude if channeled properly by SDS agitation – or to fascism if manipulated by the ruling class. In a similar vein, the Dutschke-Krahl *Organisationsreferat* largely presented a radicalized account of Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (while borrowing the term «integral statism» from Horkheimer's 1940 essay *The Authoritarian State*[21]) in identifying a homogenizing regime of false needs and in locating the potential for revolutionary agency in the linkages between (in Marcuse's terms) the global «underprivileged» revolting against their deprivation and the politicized «privileged» of the developed world[22]. Dutschke and Krahl's call for «revolutionary consciousness

[19] Tellingly, critics within the SDS such as Joscha Schmierer identified Frankfurt School critical theory as the underlying inspiration, blaming it for analytically displacing the primary contradiction in capitalism from the relation of labour and capital to that of «authoritarian system of domination and human possibilities beyond this system». J. Schmierer, *Die theoretische Auseinandersetzung vorantreiben und die Reste bürgerlicher Ideologie entschieden bekämpfen*, «INFO: Hannoversches Centralorgan der sozialistischen Basis- & Projektgruppen», 1971.
[20] W. Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, New York, Orgone, 1946; D. Herzog, *Post-War Ideologies and the Body Politics of 1968*, in J.W. Müller (ed.), *German Ideologies*, cit.
[21] W. Kraushaar, *Autoritärer Staat und Antiautoritäre Bewegung*, in *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, vol. 3, cit.
[22] H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Boston, Bea-

groups» that would orchestrate actions designed to reveal the repressive nature of the system echoed Subversive Aktion's injunction that «critique must turn over into action» with the goal of the «exposing of social repression»[23]. Indeed, Subversive Aktion (which had its origins in a group of Munich-based Situationists), with its model of decentralized, action-oriented «microcells» and strategy of staging aesthetically and rhetorically provocative actions in order to radicalize the rest of the student movement, came arguably closest to the organizational model envisaged by Dutschke and Krahl.

Notably, the fault lines between «objective» class relations and «the subjective factor» as the basis for political agency also extended onto conflicting approaches to historical analysis[24]. At the week-long SDS seminar in March 1966 «On the History of the Labour Movement», Dutschke went so far as to draw an analogy between the West Germany of then and the Russia of 1905 and 1917, in which the dynamic of capitalist development reduced social classes to «mere masses» that were incapable of articulating their discontent against the state and capital and instead «leaned toward fascistoid prejudices or parties». In this context, strategies of «terrorism» and «offensive» that «produced the subjective conditions for revolution» – as well as a well-educated and organized youth as the agent thereof – took on heightened importance. While Dutschke was characteristically eclectic in his historical references – he would later also call for a «Berlin Council Republic» on the basis of the Leninist theory of the «weakest link» in global capitalism[25] – his singling out of the «subjective factor» pitted him irreconcilably in conflict with the likes of Frank Deppe, Helmut Schauer, and others who, predictably, sought to counter his «anarchist» tendencies with «materialist logic». A new way of reading history, then, likewise fed into the attempt at a practical radicalization of critique – something that would recur in subsequent iterations of the anti-authoritarian student movement even after the dissolution of the SDS.

Post-SDS Experiments: Kadergruppen and Betriebsprojektgruppen

The 1970 dissolution of the SDS heralded a phase of «founding fever» (*Gründungsfieber*)[26] that reshuffled prior traditionalist and anti-authoritarian posi-

con Press, 1964; H. Marcuse, *Ziele, Formen und Aussichten der Studentenopposition*, «Das Argument», 1967, 45.

[23] D. Kunzelmann, C. Baldeney, R. Gasché, *Unverbindliche Richtlinien 2*, in F. Böckelmann, H. Nagel (eds.), *Subversive Aktion. Der Sinn der Organisation ist ihr Scheitern*, Frankfurt/Main, Neue Kritik, 2002.

[24] The following draws on B. Rabehl, *Subjektiver Faktor – Zur Offensivtheorie von Rudi Dutschke*, «Kalaschnikow», 1998, 10.

[25] *Ein Gespräch über die Zukunft mit Rudi Dutschke, Bernd Rabehl und Christian Semler*, «Kursbuch», 1968, 13.

[26] G. Koenen, *Gründungsfieber. Von der SDS-Auflösung zur Organisationsbewegung*, in *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, cit.

tions as former SDS activists experimented with various organizational forms in attempts to ride the momentum of the wave of wildcat strikes in West Germany starting in fall 1969. These strikes opened the floodgates for theoretical accounts of the re-emergence of a revolutionary working class, with previously more open-ended traditionalist positions often crystallizing into a more or less dogmatic insistence on the working class as the one and only revolutionary subject – yet tied to a diagnosis of a crisis of global capitalism in its «imperialist» incarnation – and the resulting imperative for a disciplined, theoretically trained vanguard to organize the workers. One of the largest of these *Kadergruppen* (or *K-Gruppen*) was Joscha Schmierer's Communist League of West Germany (KBW), which proclaimed as its goal the «buildup of the unified communist party» based on an analysis of capitalism in its global dimensions[27]. Schmierer (who served as general secretary of the central committee) analysed the upsurge in class antagonisms as the result of the «strained international competitive situation» leading West German capital to cut back on its labour costs and – taking up a theme already seen in Marcuse and Dutschke – held that anti-imperialist revolutions in the Third World were the prerequisite for revolution at home[28]. Noting that in the West German context, «the forces of revolution are objectively strong, but subjectively still very weak», Schmierer held that the KBW's task consisted, first and foremost, in «cadre formation» based on «theoretical training of the comrades» – with the ultimate goal of going into the factories in order to supplant the workers' «artisanal and trade-union practice» with a revolutionary communist one. Having indefinitely entered this phase of internal consolidation and theoretical training, the KBW practised a radicalized form of democratic centralism in which programmatic discussion produced a programmatic line to which each member had to commit personal responsibility; deviations were corrected by means of a ritual of criticism and self-criticism, in addition to polemics against «false conceptions» in the KBW's theoretical journal «*Kommunismus und Klassenkampf*». The historian Gerd Koenen, himself a KBW member for nearly a decade, would later characterize the organization as a «school of virtual totalitarianism»[29].

The anti-authoritarians were likewise drawn to the potential of a radicalized working class, especially to the very spontaneity of the wildcat strikes in the Ruhr that had come about from the wage demands of workers in defiance of the compromise results of collective bargaining through the trade unions. In early 1970, a group of Frankfurt SDS members – including prominent anti-authoritarians such as Reimut Reiche, Joschka Fischer, and Daniel Cohn-Bendit – founded Revolutionary Struggle (RK) as

[27] *Vorbemerkung der Redaktion zu den Aufgaben dieser Zeitschrift*, «Kommunismus und Klassenkampf», 1973, 1, p. 3.
[28] J. Schmierer, *Die gegenwärtige Klassenkampfsituation und die Aufgaben der Kommunisten*, «Kommunismus und Klassenkampf», 1973, 1.
[29] G. Koenen, *Bleierne Zeit. Der KBW als Schule des virtuellen Totalitarismus*, in *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, cit.

a project of entering local factories as part of the workforce in order to understand the «proletarian life context» (*proletarischer Lebenszusammenhang*) firsthand and, in the process, develop a strategy of revolutionary action in the factories[30]. In their collective plan of action, titled «Investigation – Action – Organization», the students criticized the K-Gruppen for reducing the question of class struggle to a question of organization, while also criticizing other SDS anti-authoritarians for assuming away the proletariat as «completely manipulated» and thus foreclosing the possibility of proletarian agency without even attempting to take their own actions beyond the university and into the factories[31]. The RK collective proceeded to argue that the analysis of class relations had now become a practical question due to the subsuming of the «worker to collective capital as well as to the state as collective capitalist» – a question that could not be addressed by «intellectual activity» alone, but by hands-on «engagement» in the factories. Once inside, the students would make the analysis of class relations the object of their «investigation» – and «with the political goal of precisely delineating the common interests of the workers in this factory, in order to push forth forms of spontaneous […] resistance». The phase of «action» would thus entail the development of methods of «agitation und propaganda» designed to instigate spontaneous revolt – with the question of «organization» to be addressed at a more advanced stage of the class struggle.

As this founding document demonstrates, the RK was grounded in former SDS anti-authoritarians' turn toward the theoretical framework of Italian *operaismo* – which presented a radically different account of late-capitalist «repression» than psychoanalysis or Situationism – and the experience of mass wildcat strikes in northern Italy as the political practising of this critique. *Operaismo* (also translated as «workerism») was grounded theoretically in Mario Tronti's reading of Marx's *Capital* as a theory of the autonomous class agency of the proletariat: the proletariat, in fighting for its basic class interest in the form of better wages and conditions, forced capital to undertake structural adjustments in which it sought to recover its profit margins through increased mechanization and state repression[32]. Tronti interpreted Marx's account of British workers' campaigns for a shorter working day as an instance in which labour-power, by inducing capital to innovate technologically in order to maintain its rate of profit, showed itself «capable of forcing capital to modify its own internal composition, intervening *within* capital as essential component of capitalist development»[33].

[30] R. Reiche, *Was heißt: Proletarischer Lebenszusammenhang?*, in W. Kraushaar (ed.), *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, vol. 2, cit.
[31] Revolutionärer Kampf (BPG Frankfurt), *Untersuchung – Aktion – Organisation*, «Internationale Marxistische Diskussion», 1971, 3.
[32] M. Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, Roma, DeriveApprodi, 2006.
[33] The quotations that follow are from S. Wright, *Storming Heaven. Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, London, Pluto, 2002, pp. 37-39.

Through this process of labour action and capital reaction, Tronti argued that class struggle expanded to permeate all spheres of society: with the completion of primitive accumulation in industrialized societies, capital initiated a process of «internal colonization» such that «the social relation becomes a *moment* of the relation of production […] the whole of society becomes an *articulation* of production». In stark contrast to accounts of late capitalism that emphasized the multiple mechanisms of domination beyond the labour-capital relation, Tronti posited that the heightened repression of labour by capital had come to subsume all social antagonisms; capital, as the «collective capitalist», had now attained the highest form of coercive power, constituting itself as the bureaucratic administrative state, while the working class, as the «collective worker» (or «mass worker»), had become «recomposed» into a de-skilled mass by processes of rationalization by machine power in the factory. The emancipation of the collective worker, then, consisted in the application of his class agency to «decompose» capital by smashing the machine and, by extension, the total system of class rule in the «social factory» of which the machine was the technical mechanism.

Tronti's exercise in reinterpreting Marx was one aspect of a theoretical project that had already begun with the «*Quaderni Rossi*» journal, which had initiated a series of factory «investigations» in Turin in search of the «collective worker» alienated from party and trade-union structures[34]. What had started out as a critique of the postwar PCI's immobility as a party rooted in local institutions, cultural spaces, and parliamentary politics, justified at the time in the Gramscian terms of a «war of position», thus took on further theoretical substance as well as practical footing: it was here in the Fiat plants, where processes of rationalization and recomposition of labour-power were most advanced and the alienation from the ineffective «official» organizations of the working class most pronounced, that an autonomous class agency of the proletariat might take shape. With the onset of labour struggles in Turin in 1962, intensifying into the «Hot Autumn» of mass strike actions throughout the north in 1969 and 1970, various left-wing groups came to discover the factory as an arena of struggle, but faced the question of how to reconcile their agitatory practice with the autonomous agency of the workers. The question of organization became the basis of a split between the group around Tronti's «*Classe Operaia*» journal (itself a split from «*Quaderni Rossi*») and the Pisa-based Potere Operaio; the former, preoccupied mainly with further «investigations», eventually decided against a strategy of external factory intervention altogether, while the latter adopted an ultimately «Leninist model» of small cadres intervening from an organizational centre into the factories in an at-

[34] Quaderni Rossi, *Die Arbeiterbewegung und die Autonomie des Klassenkampfes*, in C. Pozzoli (ed.), *Spätkapitalismus und Klassenkampf. Eine Auswahl aus den 'Quaderni Rossi*', Frankfurt/Main, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1972; W. Rieland, *Außerhalb der offiziellen Organisationen der italienischen Arbeiterbewegung: Zur Konstitution der "Quaderni Rossi"*, in *Organisation und Autonomie. Die Erneuerung der italienischen Arbeiterbewegung*, Frankfurt/Main, Neue Kritik, 1977.

tempt to radicalize the workers[35]. It was an organization founded on the model of this latter group, the Lotta Continua, which would influence its German counterpart and join the RK's struggles in the Opel plants.

Indeed, the RK opted for the structure of an «internal cadre» (*Innenkader*) operating within the workforce at the Opel plant in Rüsselsheim and reporting back to an «external cadre» (*Außenkader*) at the organizational base in Frankfurt. In September 1970, the first RK Innenkader joined the Opel workforce; by early 1971, the group was producing and distributing leaflets along with a workplace paper (*Betriebszeitung*) – adding to an already grueling workload at the assembly lines for the student-turned-proletarians – both adorned with the frontal fist logo borrowed from Lotta Continua[36]. The agitatory material reflected an operaist strategy of pushing for wage demands beyond those negotiated by the trade union in collective bargaining processes, with the ultimate aim of a wildcat strike in defiance of the latter. Denouncing the union's «foul compromise» with the capitalists, RK leaflets put forth the demand of a raise of «1 mark for all» – a demand calculated, in its simplicity and universality, to appeal to the common class interest of the entire workforce[37]. Articulating the class nature of this demand and of the form of action needed to realize it, another RK leaflet declared, «strike is the unification of the workers as class against the capitalist class»[38], while Lotta Continua agitators, who had joined their RK comrades at Opel, emphasized the autonomy of this class agency: «We workers today affirm the power to decide by ourselves without the mediation of the union when to strike and on what demand»[39]! Another key element of RK leaflets consisted in their rhetoric against machinery as the instrument of objectification of the workers' labour-power: «Not a single machine runs without our labour – but once it runs, it rules over us. […] We do not allocate work, the machines allocate us and our working time»[40]. The emancipatory imperative for the workers, long theorized by the Italian operaists, immortalized by Rio Reiser, and now repeated on numerous RK leaflets: «Break what breaks you» (*Macht kaputt was euch kaputt macht*)[41]!

[35] C. Pozzoli, editor's note to *Spätkapitalismus und Klassenkampf*, cit., pp. 11-12.
[36] W. Kraushaar, *Chronik 1946-1995*, in W. Kraushaar (ed.), *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 498, 507.
[37] APO-Archiv der Freien Universität Berlin, collection *Operaisten und Rätetendenzen*, 13 October 1971, Revolutionärer Kampf, *Extrablatt – 13.10.71*.
[38] APO-Archiv der Freien Universität Berlin, collection *Operaisten und Rätetendenzen*, 24 November 1971, Revolutionärer Kampf, *Extrablatt – 24.11.71*.
[39] APO-Archiv der Freien Universität Berlin, collection *Operaisten und Rätetendenzen*, undated, Lotta Continua, Revolutionärer Kampf, *Continua la lotta in tutta la Germania!*
[40] APO-Archiv der Freien Universität Berlin, collection *Operaisten und Rätetendenzen*, undated, Revolutionärer Kampf, *Flugblatt Nr. 2*.
[41] This was the title of a 1969 song written by the radical singer Rio Reiser and Norbert Krause, which became an instant hit among left-wing activists across West Germany.

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These agitatory activities ultimately failed to materialize into the spontaneous radicalization of the workforce, with one dubious exception: amid collective bargaining negotiations in fall 1971, Lotta Continua agitators and their Spanish comrades, followed by the RK cadre, broke up a union assembly and stormed the stage, calling for a wildcat strike in support of the demand for one mark for all. The mass revolt did not follow, however, and most of the RK Innenkader, in addition to the Italian and Spanish agitators, were promptly laid off. The RK would later write nonetheless: «This mass-based, strident, and initially violent intervention of the foreigners was […] one of the first mass actions of foreign workers in the [Federal Republic of Germany]»[42]. The RK's emphasis on the «foreign workers» – and the fact that the Italians and Spaniards had led the storming of the stage – was no coincidence: in a series of theses, the RK had posited that foreign workers in West Germany, by virtue of their concentration in unskilled manual labour, constituted a «core group of a particular stratum of workers, the *mass worker*»[43] – with the possibility of «united causes of struggle of Germans and foreigners» arising from the fact that German skilled workers were themselves being increasingly «dequalified» by processes of rationalization[44]. Karl Heinz Roth, in his operaist interpretation of German labour history, came to the similar conclusion that a «recomposition» of labour had taken place since the Sixties, whereby «the entrepreneurs freed the German proletarians from the dirtiest, most dangerous, and most monotonous working conditions» and replaced them with «unemployed and landless farmers from Anatolia, the Balkans, and Southern Europe»[45]. Given this theoretical basis, the leading of the charge by Italian and Spanish workers reflected an attempt to stage the revolt as one truly representative of the mass worker – though the masses of workers themselves failed to play the part.

Following this failed revolt, the RK soon turned its attention to where the real action seemed to be taking place: beginning in September 1971, groups of mostly student squatters occupying empty apartments in Frankfurt clashed with police in a series of confrontations known as the *Frankfurter Häuserkampf*[46]. The RK Außenkader, led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, sprang into action, spearheading the formation of

[42] Cited in G. Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, cit., p. 324.
[43] Their definition of *Massenarbeiter*: «[…] the worker who finds no possibility of identification in his work, who is reduced to monotony and physical exhaustion». *Nur mit den Ausländern. Die multinationale Perspektive*, «*Wir Wollen Alles*», 1973, 5. «*Wir Wollen Alles*» – a title borrowed from the Lotta Continua slogan, «Vogliamo tutto!» – was a collective newspaper project of a number of Sponti groups (foremost among them the RK), launched in early 1973.
[44] *Ibidem.*
[45] K. H. Roth, *Die "andere" Arbeiterbewegung und die Entwicklung der kapitalistischen Repression von 1880 bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Beitrag zum Neuverständnis der Klassengeschichte in Deutschland*, Munich, Trikont, 1974.
[46] W. Kraushaar, *Chronik 1946-1995*, in W. Kraushaar (ed.), *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 509-11. For a more detailed account, see also W. Kraushaar, *Der Frankfurter Häuserkampf*, in *Fischer in Frankfurt*, cit.

a city-wide squatters' council (*Häuserrat*) and taking active part in pro-occupation demonstrations-turned-clashes with police – characterized by a dynamic of visible police brutality against squatters and demonstrators alike provoking at times violent resistance from the latter. Here, on the streets of Frankfurt, the Sponti vision was closer to fruition than in the Rüsselsheim factory; indeed, an April 1974 discussion paper within the RK Innenkader at Opel noted that more and more members of the group had come to the conclusion that it was time to move away from factory agitation and «toward realistic, doable work» such as the Häuserkampf, where the RK had finally proved capable of taking up a «vanguard role» of radicalizing a spontaneous mass movement[47]. The possibility that what the RK had been looking for in the factory – the autonomous class agency of the proletariat – might better be found elsewhere led to the beginnings of attempts to extend that agency theoretically beyond the factory. In July 1974, the RK editorial collective suggested that it was now possible to «pose the question of "class autonomy" outside the factory as well: Häuserkampf, immigrants' rent strike, struggle against fare rises, youth centers movement, student movement etc.»[48]; given the operaist premise that all social struggles ultimately represented articulations of class struggle, campaigns such as the Häuserkampf could be seen as extensions of factory struggle beyond just the industrial proletariat.

Between «Autonomie» beyond the Factory and «Autonomie» as Ghetto

It was at this stage that the RK disbanded itself and, together with the other groups behind the «*Wir Wollen Alles*» publication, regrouped around the theoretical journal «*Autonomie*». An internal discussion paper shortly before the journal's launch in October 1975 noted the need for a theoretical grappling with the «autonomy of struggles» in the plural as well as for a platform capable of reaching those individuals involved in struggles that «*Wir Wollen Alles*», in its format as a coalition of local Sponti groups, could not reach[49]. Asserting that the factory as an arena of struggle had been closed off for the time being and that a «much broader reality of the class struggle» had emerged, the paper called for nothing short of the «development of a revolutionary theory appropriate to the reality» – something that could only succeed, it noted, by «imparting [this] debate in and forging it from practical connections». The paper also duly noted the importance of *operaismo* as a political tradition that required grappling with under conditions different from those of Sixties Italy. In other words, the challenge consisted in making *operaismo* usable for struggle beyond just the factory.

[47] *Autonomie ergibt sich nicht, Autonomie muß durchgesetzt werden – von Avantgarden!* «Wir Wollen Alles», 1974, 15, pp. 8-9.
[48] Redaktionskollektiv des RK, *Arbeiterautonomie!?*, «Wir Wollen Alles», 1974, 18, pp. 5-6.
[49] Collection *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*, undated, «Zum Zeitschriftenprojekt Autonomie».

Thomas Schmid's programmatic text «Organisation Kaputt» in the first issue of «*Autonomie*» presented one such attempt at a theoretical formulation. Schmid, a member of the journal's editorial collective who had been part of the RK Innenkader, opened with a critique of the «concept of the comprehensive revolutionary organization», as represented by the various K-Gruppen, as a «completely unusable and damaging instrument» – while, at the same time, affirming the possibility of a «good prospect for revolutionary activity» outside of this paradigm[50]. The concept under examination was, Schmid noted, based on the Leninist separation of spontaneous economic and class-conscious political struggles: the latter had to be brought into the field of the former (i.e. the factory) «from the outside», as Lenin's telling imagery had been, by the agency of the vanguard party. Yet in applying the Leninist «revolutionary pretension» as a general theory, a model applicable regardless of the specific historical circumstances, the K-Gruppen were adhering dogmatically to a formula that had become «as timeless as worthless» – all the more so in a West German context in which the organizational framework of a mass communist party evidently did not exist. The challenge for the undogmatic left, in this context, was no less than to conceive forms of *revolutionary practice* divorced from *revolutionary organization*. The SDS constituted a useful point of reference in this regard: in Schmid's view, the SDS had operated not as «vanguard in the traditional […] sense», but rather as «revolutionary point of reference», incorporating «the most various approaches» ranging from anti-war and anti-Emergency-Acts campaigns to democratization of the university and sexual liberation. The SDS had, in other words, recognized the fundamental *multiplicity* of emancipatory struggles and, by practising «direct action instead of mediation» – a practice focused on open-ended action rather than the application of a common theoretical line through centralized organization – allowed each of them to develop autonomously. In short, the SDS had succeeded in constituting itself as a «mass movement» – prompting the question, five years after its dissolution, how a reconstitution of an autonomous mass movement in the absence of an SDS might be possible.

Fortunately, there existed another revolutionary-theoretical paradigm, one that Schmid characterized as «usable» in contrast to the Leninist theory of revolutionary organization: that of *operaismo*. *Operaismo* posited a theory of revolutionary proletarian agency autonomous of party and trade-union organization; it was, according to Schmid, initially able to constitute an «authentic revolutionary force» in the factories of northern Italy, but soon became constrained by the capitalist class's ability to respond to labour unrest and maintain factory production in spite of the strikes. At this point, then, operaist groups faced the structural problem that the factory ceased to

[50] T. Schmid, *Facing Reality – Organisation Kaputt*, «Autonomie», 1975, 1.

constitute an objective locus of autonomous revolutionary action; the factory struggle, in other words, had to be taken beyond the factory. Schmid noted that in Italy, autonomous forms of «counter-structures and counter-power»[51] had formed outside the factory but that operaist groups themselves such as Potere Operaio had failed to draw the corresponding theoretical conclusion. Schmid, then, drew that conclusion: namely, that the most promising form of revolutionary practice in the present consisted in the extension of a practice of autonomous mass struggle beyond the factory – and this was possible in the realm of everyday life (*Alltag*), where autonomous «counter-structures» could be constructed by subjects acting «in first person» against the structures of repression and domination that they confronted in their own lived experience.

The emerging alternative milieu, in Schmid's conception, thus constituted the logical theoretical extension of operaist theory as well as the legitimate political heir to the student movement; it represented the sole path of embracing the multiplicity of emancipatory struggles while maintaining a practice of radical negation of existing conditions. The former aspect could be seen in experiments in «new forms of intercourse […] a new relationship to sexuality […] collective living» that were present in the student movement and now found multiplied expression; Schmid also noted that the same people who had engaged in these practices in the SDS, who had been «the agent of a revolutionary mass movement, not the cadre of a revolutionary organization», were the ones now organizing autonomously in the milieu. The element of radical negation was grounded in the operaist concept of the «social factory», or «Fabrikgesellschaft»[52], which consisted in the «comprehensive permeating power of hierarchy and command in all areas of society» – meaning that the multiple instances of domination in late-capitalist society all constituted arenas of antagonism and resistance in their own right. In this context, the slogan «struggle against work», Schmid argued, could not remain a solely «factory direction of struggle», but had to find practical expression as a «comprehensive rejection of domination and hierarchy» wherever the latter existed.

Schmid's text is remarkable for its bringing together of so many elements in one paradigmatic answer, not only synthesizing the specifically autonomist impulse in Italian *operaismo* with the anti-authoritarian student movement's politicized critiques of late capitalism, but also identifying the emerging alternative milieu, in all its diversity, as the practical carrier of this theoretical project. Yet Schmid's strategically selective, «de-centered» reading of *operaismo* begged a number of questions.

[51] Specifically, Schmid pointed to «other movements that did not stand in direct connection with the labour struggles, but rather gained in strength from the autonomous development of the latter (schoolchildren, women, unemployed, pop-scene, etc.)» (p. 29).
[52] The «Autonomie» journal's subtitle was, tellingly, «Materialien gegen die Fabrikgesellschaft».

Schmid held that a revolutionary challenge to the «Fabrikgesellschaft» need not start in the factory itself, but could rather form alternative spaces from within the multiple spaces of domination – in contrast to Tronti's injunction to smash the factory and its mechanism of machine production first because all other forms of domination constituted mere instances of class domination in the factory. Schmid justified this shift by pointing to the structural limitations of an autonomous struggle situated in the factory alone, in light of both Italian and German (RK) experiences; theoretically, however, this begged the question of how autonomous localized counter-structures could take on a revolutionary function on a system, as opposed to individual subject, level as long as the factory as the centre of the «Fabrikgesellschaft» had yet to be smashed. Schmid's attempt at a theoretical justification served to highlight the contradiction still further: in citing Marx to argue that revolutionary processes had to consist not only in the material negation of the old system, but also in the development of a consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) that would overcome its determination by being (*Sein*) and replace class subjectivity with the subjectivity of free and autonomous subjects, Schmid only drew further attention to the problem that the step of material overcoming of the system had yet to be achieved. How could free and autonomous subjectivity develop at all, let alone take on a revolutionary function, within a system of domination in which the factories were still running? How could localized practices, lacking the organizational framework of a nationwide movement, be revolutionary in any meaningful sense of transforming the system, beyond enabling a certain minority of individuals to lead more fulfilling lives?

Wolfgang Kraushaar took up these questions in his contribution to the 1978 volume *Autonomy or Ghetto*, critiquing the Frankfurt Sponti milieu as consumed by the «radicalization of its own life context» to the point of being disconnected from the original cause of revolutionary transformation[53]. Kraushaar was quick to recognize that the strategy of «creation of an own basis of reproduction» resulted from the failure of factory agitation and the subsequent search for a «continuation of the emancipatory struggle» by other means. The Spontis, reeling from their failure to storm the centre of factory production, had displaced their revolutionary energies into the sphere of «subjective experience and concrete daily practice», setting out to change the only thing that they could immediately change – namely, themselves. Kraushaar saw in this turn an «ideology of immediacy» and a «revolutionary impatience», an abandonment of attempts at a «negation of existing conditions» on the level of state and society altogether. For Kraushaar, the «success criterion» of milieu practice consisted precisely not in the «social efficacy of a concept of class struggle», but rather in

[53] W. Kraushaar, *Thesen zum Verhältnis von Alternativ- und Fluchtbewegung. Am Beispiel der frankfurter scene*, in W. Kraushaar (ed.), *Autonomie oder Getto? Kontroversen über die Alternativbewegung*, Frankfurt/ Main, Neue Kritik, 1978.

the «degree of development of positive life designs», independently of whether this did anything to stop the factories from running unperturbed. In other words, the Sponti milieu had become a «ghetto», closed off from and unable to do anything to change the world outside of its own autonomous spaces.

One illustration of this contradiction, Kraushaar argued, could be seen in the paradox of the cooperative enterprise. In an economy of profit-maximizing firms, the various cooperative enterprises comprising the «counter-economy» were bound to be subject to the competitive pressures of rationalization in order to maintain themselves as self-sustaining enterprises in the long term. If they did not rationalize, cooperative enterprises would face falling profit margins and remain dependent on the same milieu clientele, foreclosing any possibility of expanding its reach beyond the milieu. Furthermore, Kraushaar argued, the «counter-economy» had taken on a system-stabilizing function as a *de facto* «social agency» for «dropouts» from the regular economy; the alternative economy, by swiftly absorbing those affected by the rise of mass unemployment since 1973, relieved the state of the political pressures of an organized unemployed population (what some social historians might refer to as «negative integration»[54]). Kraushaar characterized the strategy of alternative economy as «one step forward, two steps back»: what had been conceived as a pathway into revolutionary transformation – indeed, a pathway deemed more immediately accessible in the absence of possibilities for storming the factory or overthrowing the state – led in reality to integration. In a similar vein, Kraushaar held that attempts to construct alternative cultural practices were likewise doomed to integration into the culture industry; in a telling phrase, Kraushaar characterized alternative cinema and theatre groups as «more sub- than counterculture», merely reproducing styles found in mainstream mass culture in the absence of constant, radical innovation («The alternative culture has developed into a complementary, rather than contradictory, component of the dominant one»).

Thomas Schmid's contribution to the same volume, coming three years after his programmatic text in «*Autonomie*», was notable for its sense of resignation: while questioning Kraushaar's question of «autonomy or ghetto» as premature and misleading in its dichotomy, Schmid acknowledged that the alternative milieu in Frankfurt had undergone a fundamental «economization»[55]. In the alternative economy, in particular, the subjective «interconnections» that had driven the emergence of milieu structures had become «objectified and economized»; the concrete interests originally behind the creation of «alternative institutions» had given way to an impulse to

[54] D. Groh, *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Frankfurt/Main, Ullstein, 1974.
[55] T. Schmid, *Stämme und Stammtisch: oder Bescheidener Vorschlag, die alternativen Institutionen wieder abzuschaffen*, in W. Kraushaar (ed.), *Autonomie oder Getto*, cit.

create new structures for their own sake. This tendency to fetishize the alternative structures was, in Schmid's view, symptomatic of a situation in which the conceptual vacuum left by the collapse of the «old revolutionary securities» was now filled with the sense of «new […] security» provided by the new structures. Indeed, given that the emergence of the alternative milieu had been so overdetermined – operaist theory, anti-authoritarian SDS practice, the experiences of the RK, and even the immediate pressures of unemployment and *Berufsverbote*[56] had all seemed to point to the milieu as the solution – it was not surprising that the milieu had then been held up as a kind of panacea for the question of revolutionary strategy. Kraushaar's dichotomous question of «autonomy or ghetto» was indicative of the all-or-nothing question that the alternative milieu had become: would it be *the* pathway into revolutionary transformation, or did it actually lead to nothing but integration and political incapacitation? Yet Schmid himself apparently accepted the all-or-nothing character of the question, concluding rather cryptically with «the modest proposal […] to abolish the alternative institutions and to start the journey once more from the beginning».

The debates on the perceived ghettoization of the alternative milieu intensified in the wake of the «German Autumn» of 1977, in which milieu actors looked on helplessly as the Red Army Faction ruthlessly created facts on the ground and the state responded with an unprecedented wave of repression. The experience of terrorism and state counter-terrorism heightened the sense that an organizational framework for a non-violent left beyond the local level might be necessary[57]. What followed the Tunix-Kongress of January 1978 was a process of trans-localization of the alternative milieu, most significantly in the form of a nationwide daily newspaper («*die tageszeitung*») run according to the «alternative project» model of a self-managing cooperative as well as the formation of Green Lists to contest (initially local and regional) parliamentary elections. Tellingly, the proponents of these initiatives raised the spectre of further ghettoization: one «*Pflasterstrand*» article in favor of Green Lists argued that an alternative milieu centered on an «individual programme and political abstention» could only lead to the dreaded dead-end of «accommodation»[58].

This process of trans-localization entailed a stark trade-off between the promise of de-ghettoization and the preservation of the autonomy of milieu actors: the monopoly position of «*die taz*» as the lone nationwide organ in an alternative press landscape

[56]The «Berufsverbote», in common parlance, referred to the *Radikalenerlass* passed in 1972 by the Willy Brandt government, barring members of organizations deemed to be extremist from serving in the public sector.
[57] Thomas Hartmann, Frankfurt Sponti and first editor-in-chief of «die taz»: «[The media] demanded that the left clearly distance itself from the RAF, forswear violence, and pledge allegiance to the constitution. […] We realized that we had to have our own media, in order to discuss these topics and others important to us in our own way. […] We needed something daily and nationwide, more like France's *Libération*». P. Hockenos, *Joschka Fischer*, cit., p. 126.
[58] *Grüne Liste – Natur als Politik*, «Pflasterstrand», 3 November 1977, pp. 30-32.

meant a «structural transformation of the alternative public», whereby localized press organs became dependent on a centralized filter for a wider reach[59]; the Green Party's procedures of grassroots democracy were predicated on party membership, with the initially low ratio of members to parliamentarians serving to strengthen the latter's weight within the party and hastening the Greens' evolution from a «movement party» into a parliamentary party like any other[60]. Paradigmatically, the restructuring of the Frankfurt alternative paper «*Pflasterstrand*» from a cooperative into a limited liability company under Cohn-Bendit's leadership in 1987 reflected the changed political context in which leading milieu actors had turned into party actors who no longer had a stake in the autonomy of the alternative projects[61]. Ultimately, then, Kraushaar's conundrum of «autonomy or ghetto»? remained unresolved: if the turn to autonomy had led to ghettoization, the breakout from the ghetto now came at the expense of autonomy.

Conclusion

Schmid's synthesis of late-capitalist German philosophy and Italian autonomist politics served the practical function of formulating a conception of revolutionary practice decoupled from revolutionary organization and of milieu practice as a continuation of student movement practice. Yet this theoretical move was accomplished at the expense of displacing the very notion of «revolutionary practice» from the system to the subject level: as Kraushaar so penetratingly observed, the revolution would no longer be about revolutionizing the system, but about revolutionizing the one thing that could be revolutionized – namely, individual life experiences and immediate daily environments. Indeed, the very term «Fabrikgesellschaft» as the German rendition of «social factory» (*fabbrica sociale*) and as the subtitle of the «*Autonomie*» journal was a revealing semantic turn: in contrast to the «social factory», in which all social antagonisms found their culmination in the factory as the central arena of contestation, the «Fabrikgesellschaft» reflected the ambivalence of a society in which the factories kept running, but in which localized spaces of autonomy and resistance were emerging. Yet the mechanisms by which the latter might act to negate the former – or, to put it another way, how life-world might colonize system and not the other way around – were not thought through; indeed, milieu actors faced with the

[59] K.H. Stamm, *Alternative Öffentlichkeit. Die Erfahrungsproduktion neuer sozialer Bewegungen*, Frankfurt/ Main, Campus, 1988, pp. 241-55.
[60] M. Mayer, J. Ely, *Successes and Dilemmas of Green Party Politics*, in M. Mayer, J. Ely (eds.), *The German Greens. Paradox between Movement and Party*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1998; A. Demirović, *Grassroots Democracy: Contradictions and Implications*, in M. Mayer, J. Ely (eds.), *The German Greens*, cit.
[61] S. Horn, *Abschied vom Kollektiv. Der Frankfurter Pflasterstrand*, Frankfurt/Main, Brandes & Apsel, 1989.

problem of «ghettoization» found no other answer than an extension of alternative projects beyond the local level at the expense of their autonomous character.

From here, it took only a small leap to advocate a «post-industrial liberalism», as Schmid went on to do as one of the initiators of the «eco-libertarian» current in the Green Party[62]. The object of critique was now no longer the «Fabrikgesellschaft», but rather the «industrialism» that was destroying nature and restricting human freedom through both state and industrial regimentation; the guiding concept of Green politics would not be «autonomy», but «freedom» from this state-industrial regime; and its agent would not be some closed-off milieu, but rather the normal citizen[63]. In a sense, Schmid, no longer the theorist of revolution but as ever the «surfer of the Zeitgeist»[64], was once again drawing radical theoretical conclusions from developments on the ground: the breakout from the ghetto and into nationwide electoral politics had to entail a shift in orientation toward the freedom of all, not just the autonomy of the milieu – literally a «return of the left to its own country»[65] – as well as a resolute anti-statism in the face of the supposed crisis of the welfare state[66]. Much has been written on the wider ideational symbiosis of this kind of post-'68 «politics of freedom» with neo-liberalism[67].

Yet Schmid's 1975 text, while situated within the framework of revolutionary theory, already signaled a decisive departure from Dutschke's vision of the «long march through the institutions» that had long been at odds with practical reality – that is, long before Green Realos and mainstream commentators alike appropriated the concept to describe (whether with jubilation or dismay) the Greens' rise through the parliamentary institutions and into state and federal governments. In a 1967 essay, Dutschke and two co-authors had conceived the long march as a combination of «subversive undermining work» by «revolutionary specialists» and the «creation of a counter-milieu» encompassing spaces such as «houses, kindergartens, cinemas, institutes, schools, universities etc.»; a war of maneuver would go hand in hand with a war of position, with the revolutionaries' ranks multiplied through the continual

[62] For a more detailed account and critique, see W. Kraushaar, *Die neue Leutseligkeit*, in H. Dubiel (ed.), *Populismus und Aufklärung*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1986.
[63] *Einigkeit und Grün und Freiheit. Ökolibertäre Grüne – Gründungserklärung*, «Kommune», 1984, 4.
[64] W. Kraushaar, *Die neue Leutseligkeit*, in H. Dubiel (ed.), *Populismus*, cit.
[65] T. Schmid, *Terra incognita. Erkundungen über die Deutschen und ein Plädoyer für die Rückkehr der Linken in ihr eigenes Land*, in L. Baier (ed.), *Die Linke neu denken – Acht Lockerungen*, Berlin, Klaus Wagenbach, 1984.
[66] For intellectual context on this debate and period, see J. Habermas, *Die Krise des Wohlfahrtsstaates und die Erschöpfung utopischer Energien*, in *Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit. Kleine politische Schriften V*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1985.
[67] D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Social Change*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990; L. Boltanski, E. Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London, Verso, 2007; N. Fraser, *A Triple Movement? Parsing the Politics of Crisis after Polanyi*, «New Left Review», 2013, 81.

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formation of emancipatory subjects in the milieu[68]. It is an indication of how far-fetched this vision had become by 1975 – especially with the withering away of the SDS as a unifying organizational framework – that the most sophisticated political imagination at this juncture called for a theoretical displacement from the one level to the other: from system to subject, from maneuver to position, from offensive to milieu. It is also an indication of the fundamental heterogeneity in what constituted the German '68: Dutschke's long march could hold together only if its participants operated under something like a common understanding of «what they thought they were doing»[69] – which they clearly did not, from the fundamental divisions within the SDS over the relationship between critique and action to the post-SDS organizational fragmentation and crystallization of conflicting theoretical positions. It is in this sense that Dutschke's sobering reflection from 1970 that «we were never a student movement» might be understood: not one movement, but multiple movements that thought differently about what it was that they were doing[70].

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[68] R. Dutschke, T. Käsemann, R. Schöller, foreword to R. Debray, F. Castro, G. Mandel, *Der lange Marsch. Wege der Revolution in Lateinamerika*, Munich, Trikont, 1968.
[69] J.W. Müller, *What Did They Think*, in V. Tismaneanu (ed.), *Promises of 1968*, cit.
[70] R. Dutschke, *Wir waren niemals eine Studentenbewegung*, in *Geschichte ist machbar*, cit.

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